Questioning Route for MSU Extension Focus Group Sessions

- Good morning and welcome to the Michigan State University Extension's ANR program focus group session. My name is __________ and I am ______________ at MSU. Assisting me is ____________, ______ at MSU. We are here to listen to you, our long-time partners, friends and customers. More specifically, we are interested in your thoughts and opinions regarding Michigan State University Extension's Agricultural and Natural Resources program. The purpose of this focus group is to gather our stakeholders' perceptions about the quality of educational programs offered by the ANR program and then to use that information to help MSUE enhance its Extension programs. Your responses will also help us design a mail survey which we will use in a state-wide study, beginning in January 1996. Therefore it is very important that you respond as honestly and as thoughtfully as you can.

- We will audio tape the session, but the tape will only be used to help us take accurate notes of our conversation. We guarantee the confidentiality of your responses; no transcribed comments will be attributed to any individual. Because the audio recordings will help us recall and analyze what you say, it is important you speak up so we don't miss your comments. It is also important that you speak one person at a time. If several people speak at once, our tape will be difficult to understand.

- If any question is confusing or ambiguous, please let us know. Because everyone's views and opinions are important, we ask that everyone participate in the discussion. Please keep in mind that we are very interested in both positive as well as negative comments.

- The session will last about 100 minutes, and we will not take a formal break. If you wish to get up for coffee or a snack, please feel free to do so.

- Do you have any questions before we begin?
FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS
Field Crops Industry Advisory Committee

Note: We will distribute this page to all Advisory Committee members during the focus group session.

1. Let us find out some more about each other by going around the room. Tell us your name, where you live, and what first comes to mind when you hear the words, "Michigan State University Extension".

2. What are you hearing people say about the Agriculture and Natural Resources program's Extension work in your community? How has Extension’s work changed in the recent past?

3. Think back to an experience you have had with MSU Extension that was outstanding. Describe it.

4. Think back to an experience you have had with MSU Extension that was disappointing. Describe it. How could Extension change its programming?

5. Michigan State University Extension has adopted an Area of Expertise (AOE) team approach to Extension work. Have you taken advantage of the Area of Expertise (AOE) Teams? What have been your impressions of the AOE Team performance during the past year?

6. What do you consider as major areas of unmet educational needs of Michigan farmers and agri-businesses?

7. How can MSU Extension's Field Crop AOE Team improve its future program offerings? Could you suggest specific ways to improve Field Crop Extension programs?

8. Are there any final comments, recommendations or thoughts you may have about either Michigan State University Extension or its Agriculture and Natural Resources program?

9. Have we missed anything?
Our time has passed quickly. On behalf of AEE Center for Evaluative Studies, Dr. _____ and I thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules to help us with this important study. Your comments and suggestions will help us design more effective educational programs.

Preparation for Focus Group Sessions

- Focus group sessions will be held in January-February, 1996. Field Crops Advisory Committee is meeting on January 29, 1996. Meetings for livestock AOE Advisory Committees is scheduled on February 26, 1996. Dairy team will soon decide on their meeting date.

- Each AOE Co-Chairs should send an invitation letter to the Advisory Committee members. We need to include "a campus map highlighting the meeting location and day-long parking permit" in the letter. The focus group session will be held in the morning hours, beginning 9:30 a.m., and the afternoon could be devoted to AOE Advisory Committee meeting.

- We need to prepare name tags for each focus group.

- Schedule a meeting room in a good location, convenient and easy to find.

- Arrange for refreshments (coffee, juices, fruits, bagels and donuts). At the conclusion of the focus group, members could be invited for a luncheon meeting.

- AEE Center for Evaluative Studies will arrange for tape recorder, facilitator, etc.
Sample Invitation Letter

Letterhead

Date

Name
Address
City, State, Zip

Dear -------

We are writing to ask your assistance in a special project. It will take just two hour of your time and will take place in East Lansing, prior to our upcoming Field Crops/Dairy/Livestock Advisory Committee meeting on January _____, 1996. We are conducting a special study to inform and guide future decisions regarding the Area of Expertise (AOE) Team within the Agricultural and Natural Resources (ANR) program of Michigan State University Extension. We have chosen you because you are a well respected thought-leader in our agriculture industry.

We have asked our colleagues at the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education to assist us in conducting this focus group. The focus group is a semi-structured conversation among carefully selected participants (in this case, you) who represent farmers and agri-businesses in Michigan. If you have never participated in a focus group before, we think you will find the interchange among your colleagues enjoyable and informative. You will also have the satisfaction of knowing you have made a valuable contribution to MSU Extension and farmers and agri-businesses in Michigan.

We will be meeting on December / January, _____, 1996 at 9:30 a.m in Room ____. ______________ __________. Please send the enclosed reply post-card back by December 20 (or appropriate date in January for Dairy and Livestock AOE Team Advisory Committee members) to let us know if you can participate. Feel free to contact us if you have any questions on this project. Dr. Murari Svedi of Agricultural and Extension Education will send you further information on the focus groups session.

Thank you for your continued support.

signature
Co-Chair, AOE Team

signature
Co-Chair, AOE Team